

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Canceled)
2. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim ~~1~~ 2, wherein the pasteurization apparatus is selected from the group consisting of an impingement oven, a steam tunnel, an ultra violet light tunnel, and radurization equipment.
3. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim ~~1~~ 2, further comprising:  
  
chilling the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.
4. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim ~~1~~ 2, further comprising:  
  
aseptically packaging the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.
5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 5 2, wherein the potato pieces packaged in a clean room environment have a shelf life of at least 60 days at refrigerated temperatures.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the steps of:

obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces;

storing the frozen par-fried potato pieces; ~~and~~

surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an exit into a clean room environment, the surface pasteurizing providing at least one final microbial count selected from the group consisting of:

less than 1.0-3.0 log CFU/g aerobic plate count;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g coliforms;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Escherchia coli*;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Staphylococcus aureus*;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g molds; and

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g yeasts;

wherein the potato pieces are negative for *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella*, *Clostridium botulinum*, *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, and *Staphylococcus aureus*; and  
packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.

wherein the modified atmosphere includes about 5.0% O<sub>2</sub>, from about 0% to about 15.0% CO<sub>2</sub>, and from about 0% to about 80% N<sub>2</sub>.

8. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 5 9, wherein the modified atmosphere includes ~~food-grade oxygen, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen,~~ argon, sulfur dioxide, and mixtures thereof.

9. (Currently Amended) A method ~~in accordance with Claim 8~~ of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the steps of:  
obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces;  
storing the frozen par-fried potato pieces;  
surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an exit into a clean room environment; and  
packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces,

wherein the modified atmosphere includes ~~from about 0% to~~ about 5.0% O<sub>2</sub>, from about 0% to about 15.0% CO<sub>2</sub>, and from about 0% to about 80% N<sub>2</sub>.

10. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein the modified atmosphere includes 80% nitrogen, 10-15% carbon dioxide, and ~~0-5%~~ 5% oxygen.

11. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 2, wherein the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces is subsequent to the step of storing the frozen par fried potato pieces.

12. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 2, wherein the step of obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces includes lowering a temperature of the par-fried potato pieces to less than 24 °F.

13. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 2, further comprising transporting the frozen par fried potato pieces from a first location where the step of obtaining frozen par, fried potato pieces occurs to a second location where the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces occurs, the second location off-site from the first location.

14. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 2, wherein the method manages the inventory of French fried potatoes having an extended shelf life at a refrigerated temperature and having a reduced reconstitution time.

15. (New) A method of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the steps of:

treating potatoes in a water bath, the water bath containing antimicrobial processing aids;

cutting the potatoes into potato pieces;  
exposing the potato pieces to steam and/or water to blanch the potato pieces,  
the steam and/or water containing at least one preservative;  
par-frying the potato pieces at a time and a temperatures sufficient to achieve  
French fried potato pieces with about 38 % total solids, about 6 % fat, and about 1 % sodium  
chloride when frozen;  
freezing par-fried potato pieces;  
surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an  
exit into a clean room environment; and  
packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean room  
environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.

16. (New) The method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the antimicrobial  
processing aids include one or a combination of chlorine, oxiperiacetic acid, and ozone.

17. (New) The method in accordance with claim 15, wherein a temperature of  
the water bath is between about 51.7°C and about 65.6°C.

18. (New) The method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the preservative  
includes disodium dihydrogen pyrophosphate (SAPP), sodium metabisulfate, salt, or  
combinations thereof.

19. (New) The method in accordance with claim 15, comprising passing the blanched potato pieces through an antimicrobial dip, the antimicrobial dip including potassium sorbate.

20. (New) The method in accordance with claim 15, wherein the modified atmosphere includes from about 0% to about 5.0% O<sub>2</sub>, from about 0% to about 15.0% CO<sub>2</sub>, and from about 0% to about 80% N<sub>2</sub>.

21. (New) The method in accordance with claim 20, wherein the oxygen in the modified atmosphere is about 5.0%.